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ABSTRACT

Johnson County Community College, a suburban Kansas community college, conducted annual one-year and three-year follow-up studies of career program completers and their employers. The college used the follow-up studies as a component of an institutional effectiveness assessment program, the purpose of which is to elicit evaluations of college programs and services, and to develop insights into career and educational experiences after students have left the college. The methodology consisted of a three-tiered approach incorporating contact with graduated students through telephone interviews, follow-up surveys for nonrespondents, and an annual employer survey which attempted to determine employer evaluations of the preparation received by former career program students at the college. The results of the studies indicated that the majority of respondents had achieved their educational objectives, progressed in their careers, and improved in a variety of cognitive and noncognitive behaviors as a result of their college experiences. Such studies are not only important to assess the college programs' effectiveness, but they also enhance cooperation between the college and local business and industry, and provide salary and placement data that can be utilized in recruitment efforts and career decision-making for future students. Contains seven references. (GLR)

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Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness:
Career Student Outcomes

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This paper was presented at the Thirtieth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at The Galt House, Louisville, Kentucky, May 13-16, 1990. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Jean Endo
Chair and Editor
Forum Publications Editorial
Advisory Committee

Abstract

This paper describes the methodology and results of annual one-year and three-year follow-up studies of career program completers and their employers as components of an institutional effectiveness assessment program. The purpose of these studies was to elicit evaluations of college programs and services, and insights into career and educational experiences after leaving the college. Results indicated that the majority of respondents had achieved their educational objectives, progressed in their careers, and improved a variety of cognitive and noncognitive behaviors as a result of their college experiences.

Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness:

Career Student Outcomes

The mandate to formulate and utilize reliable indices of institutional effectiveness is clear and unambiguous, both for community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. Unlike four-year institutions, however, community colleges cannot point to the number of annual graduates as a valid measure of institutional effectiveness. Rather, community colleges must, in part, rely on attainment of individual educational objectives, student satisfaction with various aspects of their community college experience, success in the workplace subsequent to completion of a course of study, and other such indices.

Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness

Assessing institutional effectiveness is, quite simply, a comparison of results achieved to goals intended (Ewell, 1985). Thus, mission statements and institutional goals become the key to measuring institutional effectiveness. The literature identifies four core missions which are common among community colleges: 1) transfer, 2) career programs, 3) continuing education, and 4) community service and remedial education/adult literary (Tucker, Rooney & Hughes, in press). By looking at what students and graduates know and are able to do with their knowledge, as well as their perceptions of the quality of institutional programs and services, researchers can obtain important information about programs' ability to meet stated objectives for student development. The collective quality of its programs establishes the effectiveness of an institution (Banta, 1988).

Various alumni surveys exploring career and educational outcomes have been utilized by community colleges as components of the ongoing assessment of institutional effectiveness for some time. Results of studies of career program completers, together with current employment projections and salary ranges for courses of study offered at the college, are also used for student recruitment, program review, as a basis for needs assessments, and for career decision making by current college students, local high school students, and other members of the college constituency.

There are, however, few published reports of follow-up studies designed to provide data to inform overall efforts of institutions' attempts to measure their effectiveness in relation to the accomplishment of their mission. More specifically, attempts to do so for the career/vocational mission, for example in a statewide study in California, are described as "limited" (Carvell, 1986).

A recent article in The Chronicle of Higher Education quoting the authors of The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985 states, "although evidence is fragmentary, existing data suggest that the alumni of vocational programs frequently are unable to find work in the occupations for which they were trained." This misperception of the employability of community college career program completers quite conceivably may have resulted from the dearth of reliable follow-up data in the literature.

Perhaps the time has come for all levels of higher education to seriously consider the importance of not only conducting comprehensive follow-up studies designed to measure the level of institutional effectiveness in terms of

preparing career students for satisfying futures, but of sharing the results of such studies with colleagues as well.

Student Outcomes Assessment at JCCC

Johnson County Community College (JCCC), a suburban Midwestern community college, has conducted annual follow-up studies of the previous year's career program completers for some time. However, within the past year a series of questions designed explicitly to elicit former students' perceptions, attitudes, self-reported cognitive and noncognitive outcomes, and evaluations which would inform the JCCC institutional effectiveness assessment effort were added to the one-year follow-up study of career program completers. Identical questions were also incorporated into four new JCCC studies, thus providing a comprehensive assessment of student outcomes for all segments of the JCCC student body. Together these surveys reached:

- 1) students completing a JCCC career program within the previous year (the one-year follow-up study),
- 2) students completing a JCCC career program three years previously (the three-year follow-up study),
- 3) short-term leavers (students enrolled during the previous year who had not completed a course of study, transferred, or re-enrolled)
- 4) long-term leavers (students enrolled three years previously who had not completed a course of study, transferred, or re-enrolled) and,
- 5) transfer students, excluding career program completers.

Over time, results of these five studies will provide comparative data on the effectiveness of the institution in preparing all students to fulfill

their individual objectives for personal, educational, and professional growth.

Follow-up of Career Program Completers

The success of follow-up studies is heavily dependent upon the accuracy of the list of potential respondents. Consequently at JCCC considerable effort is directed toward development of a comprehensive, accurate list of each year's career program completers which includes graduates, certificate recipients, and students leaving with marketable skills.

Career program completers who graduate or earn certificates may be readily identified through the student data base at most colleges and universities. Identification of completers leaving with marketable skills presents a more difficult challenge. At JCCC this is accomplished through a program verification/completion status process which is conducted each fall and spring.

Verification/Completion Status Process

The verification/completion status process is a procedure whereby the accuracy of the college program intent code is verified, and data are collected indicating whether the student plans to continue in the program, graduate, leave with marketable skills, drop out, or transfer to a four-year college or university at the close of that semester.

Master program enrollment lists and class rosters for career programs in each division are provided to program administrators who, in turn, pass along appropriate class rosters and written instructions to classroom instructors. In class, students are asked to verify the accuracy of their program intent code and indicate their plans at the close of that semester. If the program

intent code is inaccurate, a change form to correct the code is completed by the student at that time. Completion codes and changes in program intent are then transferred from the class rosters to the master program list by the career program administrator. Finally, the corrected master list and change forms are forwarded to the Office of Institutional Research for processing.

After the academic year draws to a close, a single computer file is created combining graduates, certificate recipients, and students leaving with marketable skills. Duplicates are eliminated, and alphabetical listings identified by career program are developed. The accuracy of these lists of career program completers is verified with each career program administrator, after which the actual follow-up study is initiated.

Methodology

A three-tiered approach is utilized for both the one-year and three-year follow-up of career program completers. First, telephone interviews are conducted with as many completers as possible. A commercial market research firm conducts the telephone interviews from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm Monday through Saturday of the first week in January. Prior to initiation of the telephone interviews, a thorough orientation session is conducted with all interviewers by a professional from the JCCC Office of Institutional Research.

After the telephone phase is completed, nonrespondents are mailed a follow-up survey and cover letter, followed by a second mailing two weeks later. Finally, career program administrators are provided with a list of remaining nonrespondents and offered the opportunity to locate them. These efforts have resulted in response rates of between 70 and 80 percent.

Follow-up of Employers

Alfred (1989) has suggested that colleges are much more proficient at internal assessments of the effectiveness of their programs than at determining the satisfaction of external audiences with the "products" of those programs, i.e., performance of students in the occupations and professions for which they were trained. In an attempt to obtain this type of assessment information, JCCC also conducts an annual survey of employers to determine their evaluations of the preparation received by former career program students at the college.

Specifically, employers identified by respondents to the one-year follow-up study who were employed in jobs related to their JCCC career program are mailed a survey to ascertain perceptions and opinions of the career preparation their employee had received at JCCC, and to elicit suggestions for improvements in the program to better meet existing needs in the workplace. One follow-up survey is sent two weeks after the initial mailing. These efforts have consistently resulted in a response rate approximating 80 percent.

Results and Conclusions

JCCC career program completers fare very well after leaving the college. Follow-up studies of recent career program completers have consistently indicated that approximately four out of five respondents were employed in jobs related to their JCCC career preparation. Additionally, those employed full-time in related jobs have reported average hourly wages which exhibited consistent increases year after year.

Nearly 90 percent of the 1989 three-year follow-up study respondents employed in jobs related to their JCCC career preparation reported they had progressed in their field since completing the JCCC career program three years ago, verifying another important outcome of career programs.

These data have provided valuable information for the college's career program outlook reports (detailed descriptions of local, regional and national employment, placement and salary information) which are used in the career decision-making process, for recruitment, and by local business and industry to help determine prevailing wages within given career fields. See Table 1.

Insert Table 1

Nearly 90 percent of career program completers who responded to the 1990 one-year study and 91.5 percent of respondents to the 1989 three-year study had achieved their educational objective at the community college. The majority in both groups indicated JCCC helped them to improve a variety of cognitive and noncognitive skills, including oral and written communication, decision making, and tolerance for people and ideas. See Table 2.

Insert Table 2

Respondents to the 1989 and 1990 studies also reported a high level of satisfaction with JCCC. For example, over 90 percent would not only recommend JCCC to friends, but would also encourage their own children to attend JCCC. Over 90 percent also indicated their experiences at JCCC had improved the quality of life for them and, if starting now, they would definitely attend

JCCC again. In fact, of those currently pursuing additional education, between 30 and 40 percent were re-enrolled at JCCC.

For those who had attended both JCCC and a four-year college or university, the level of satisfaction with most aspects of college was substantially greater for both groups at JCCC than at the four-year recipient institution. This was especially true for quality of instruction, the registration process, the helpfulness and individual attention received, and the academic advisement and counseling available. See Table 3.

Insert Table 3

Approximately 90 percent of employers have rated the completers' overall job preparation as "very good" or "good" year after year. Evaluations of other aspects of job performance have also remained very positive. Employer comments pertaining to the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the JCCC career programs have provided guidance to career program administrators in their continual quest to assure a curriculum which most effectively meets current workforce needs. See Table 4.

Insert Table 4

Nearly 70 percent of employers responding to the follow-up study indicated they anticipated hiring additional workers in the same career field within three to five years, thus providing the college with a valuable list of potential employers for future career program completers and functioning as a kind of informal needs assessment. This employer list has also been utilized

by the college's Career Planning and Placement Center for job development, and by the college's Business and Industry Institute for promotion of customized training opportunities.

Implications for Practice

Thus, the one-year and three-year follow-up studies of career program completers described here serve useful functions on a variety of levels. Obviously, they indicate that the college's career programs are highly effective, and that this important component of the college's mission is being accomplished very successfully. In addition, however, results of these studies enhance the cooperative association of the college with local business and industry, assuring that JCCC career programs will continue to provide completers who are adequately prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly changing workplace. Salary and placement data are utilized in recruitment efforts and inform the career decision-making process for current and future JCCC students.

Results of these studies also inform the college's comprehensive program review and a variety of other internal processes. Thus, it is clear that one-year and three-year follow-up studies of career program completers are effective tools to determine the efficacy of career offerings and the degree to which career students meet their educational objectives. As such, they serve as integral components in an overall institutional effectiveness assessment effort.

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Table 1
Employment in Related Jobs

Study	n	Percent in Related Jobs	Average Hourly Wage
1989 three-year follow-up study of career program completers	292	82.8%	\$11.73
1990 one-year follow-up study of career program completers	326	78.8	10.38
1989 one-year follow-up study of career program completers	312	80.1	9.90
1988 one-year follow-up study of career program completers	366	79.5	9.39
1987 one-year follow-up study of career program completers	357	78.2	8.61

Table 2
Self-Report "Value Added"

Item	Percent Agreement	
	<u>1990</u>	<u>1989</u>
	<u>One-Year Study</u> (n=326)	<u>Three-Year Study</u> (n=292)
Improved oral communication skills	73.0%	71.8%
Improved decision-making skills	69.9	74.8
Broadened knowledge of arts & sciences	69.9	71.8
Improved written communication skills	67.6	62.3
Improved time management skills	67.0	61.8
Clarified personal values & goals	66.3	61.7
Expanded tolerance for people & ideas	62.9	64.0
Improved interpersonal skills	59.6	56.3
Achieved educational objective	88.0	91.5

NOTE: Data were collected utilizing a 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Thus, the percentages indicate strongly agree and somewhat agree responses combined.

Table 3
JCCC/Transfer Satisfaction

Item	Percent Satisfied ¹			
	<u>1-Year Study (1990)</u>		<u>3-Year Study (1989)</u>	
	4-Year ²		4-Year ²	
	JCCC	Institution	JCCC	Institution
Facilities & equipment	89.9%	69.2%	95.8%	71.3%
Quality of instruction	91.5	80.3	94.8	79.4
Helpfulness/individual attn.	87.6	61.8	90.4	57.9
Variety of courses	84.4	86.2	89.4	82.3
Registration process	85.7	55.3	89.0	51.1
Convenience of scheduling	83.1	65.8	86.9	70.4
Career/transfer preparation	69.1	55.5	75.2	64.4
Advisement & counseling	71.3	51.7	72.9	48.6
Job placement services	44.1	23.1	64.4	32.5
Financial aid/scholarships	42.4	52.3	48.3	58.3

¹ Data were collected utilizing a 5-point scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Thus, the percentages indicate very satisfied and somewhat satisfied responses combined.

² Over 40 percent of 4-year colleges and universities cited were located outside of Kansas.

Table 4
Employer Ratings of JCCC Career Program Completers
Employed Full-Time in Related Jobs

Item	Percent "Good/Very Good"			
	<u>1990</u> (n=154)	<u>1989</u> (n=161)	<u>1988</u> (n=147)	<u>1987</u> (n=173)
Job-related conceptual knowledge	89.5%	89.4%	90.1%	90.4%
Job-related technical knowledge	88.2	91.3	89.4	84.3
Attitude toward work	90.1	91.8	90.8	93.5
Quality of work	89.5	91.3	90.0	90.0
Communications/interpersonal skills	83.0	79.5	80.9	81.2
Overall job preparation	92.1	90.4	88.0	88.8